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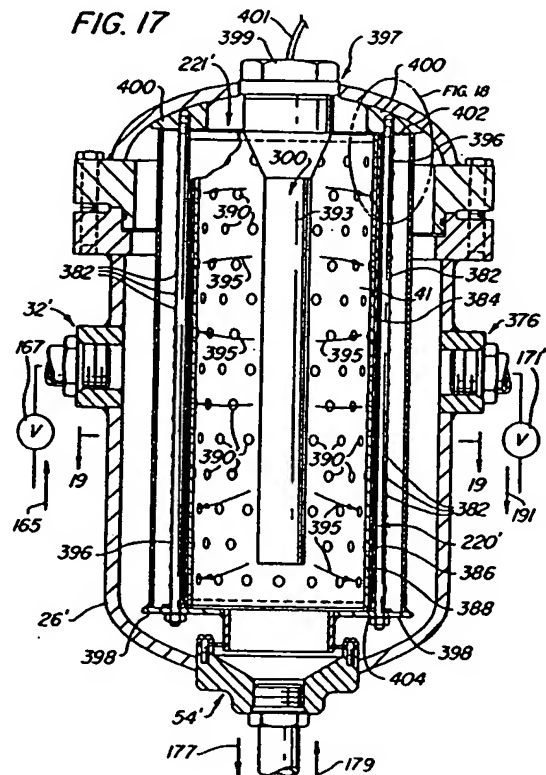
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(54) Abstract Title

Cleaning filters in situ using ultrasound

(57) A filter is cleaned by a combination of ultrasound vibrations and backwashing with filtrate. In filtering mode, fuel oil enters via inlet valve 167 and passes outside-in through a cylindrical filter 220' and out through outlet port 54' to a diesel engine or gas turbine on a ship. In cleaning mode, a controller (ns) causes clean fuel oil to flow in reverse direction (arrow 179) in through the outlet port 54' and inside-out through the cylindrical filter 220' and out through drain valve 171'. While there is still clean fuel oil in the interior of the filter, an ultrasonic generator is energised to create vibrations 395 which dislodge any remaining particulates trapped in the filter. The filter comprises an outer wire cloth layer 384 with pores of 5 microns, an intermediate 40-50 mesh layer 386 and an inner perforated metal cylinder 388, all welded together. The filter is surrounded by a perforated wall 380, and the annular space between the two is divided up into independent sectors (394) by support members 392 to ensure that the incoming dirty fuel oil is dispersed all around the filter. Duplex filters which are cleaned by backwashing and/or rotation with respect an elongate brush are also disclosed.



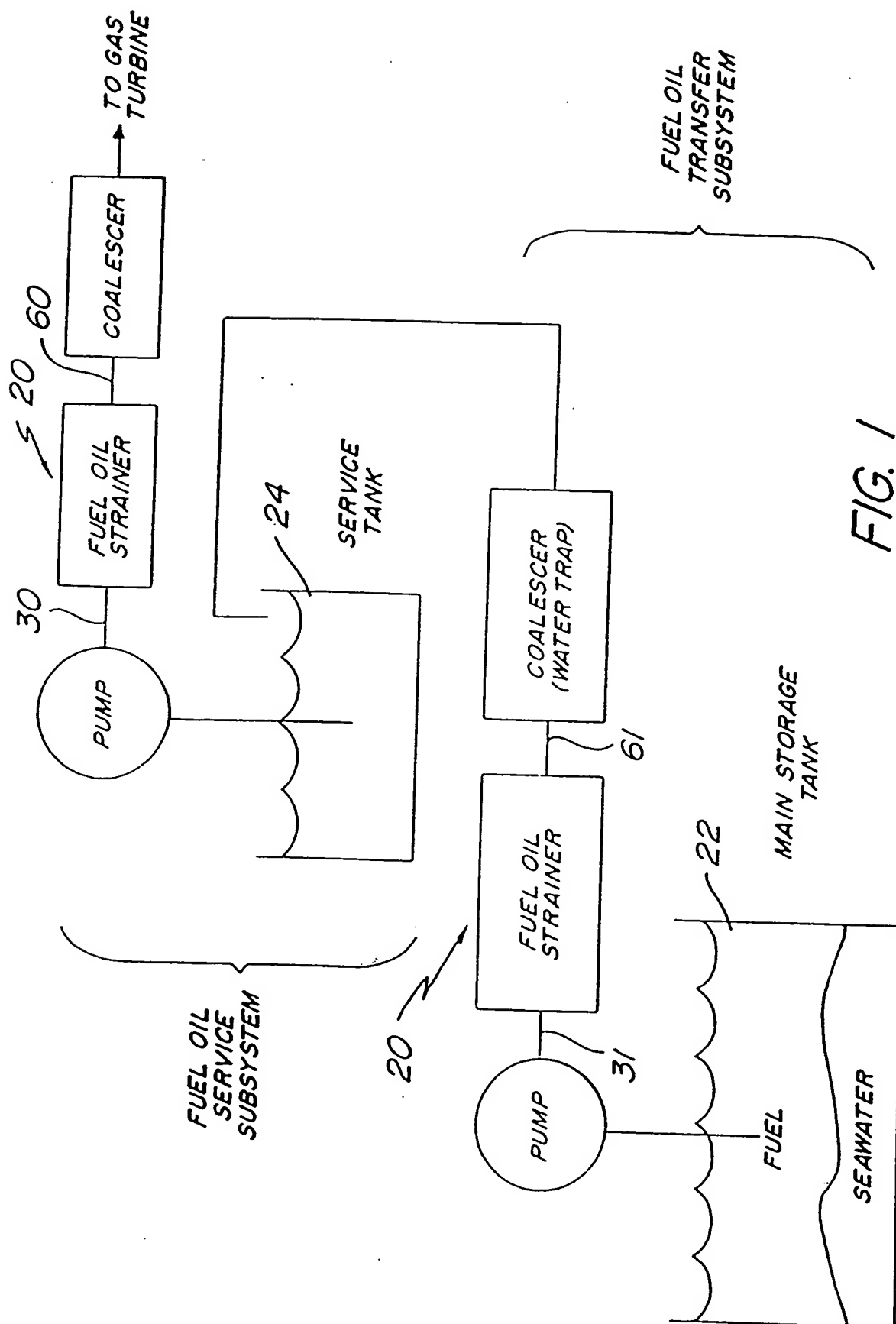


FIG. 1

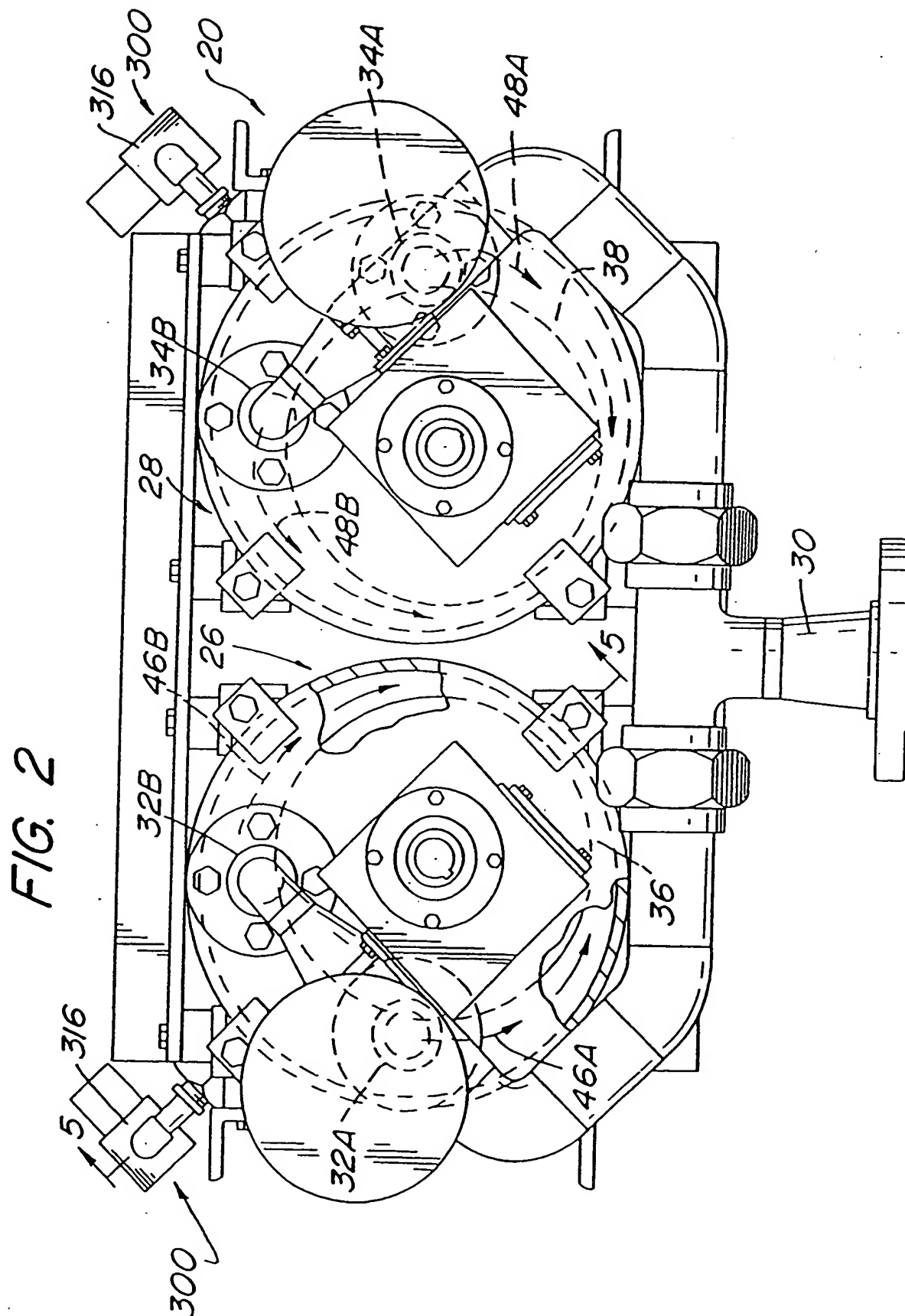
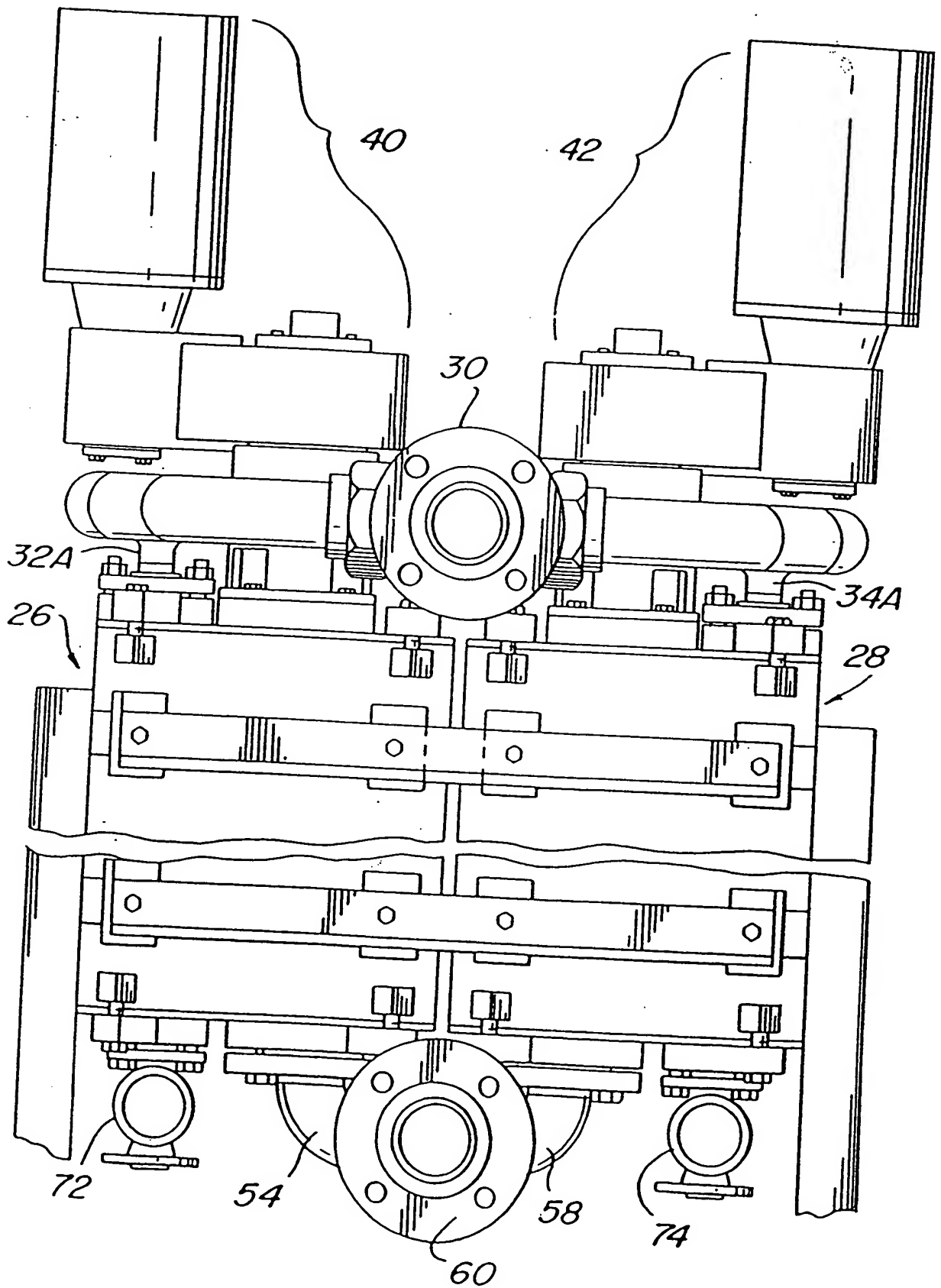


FIG. 3

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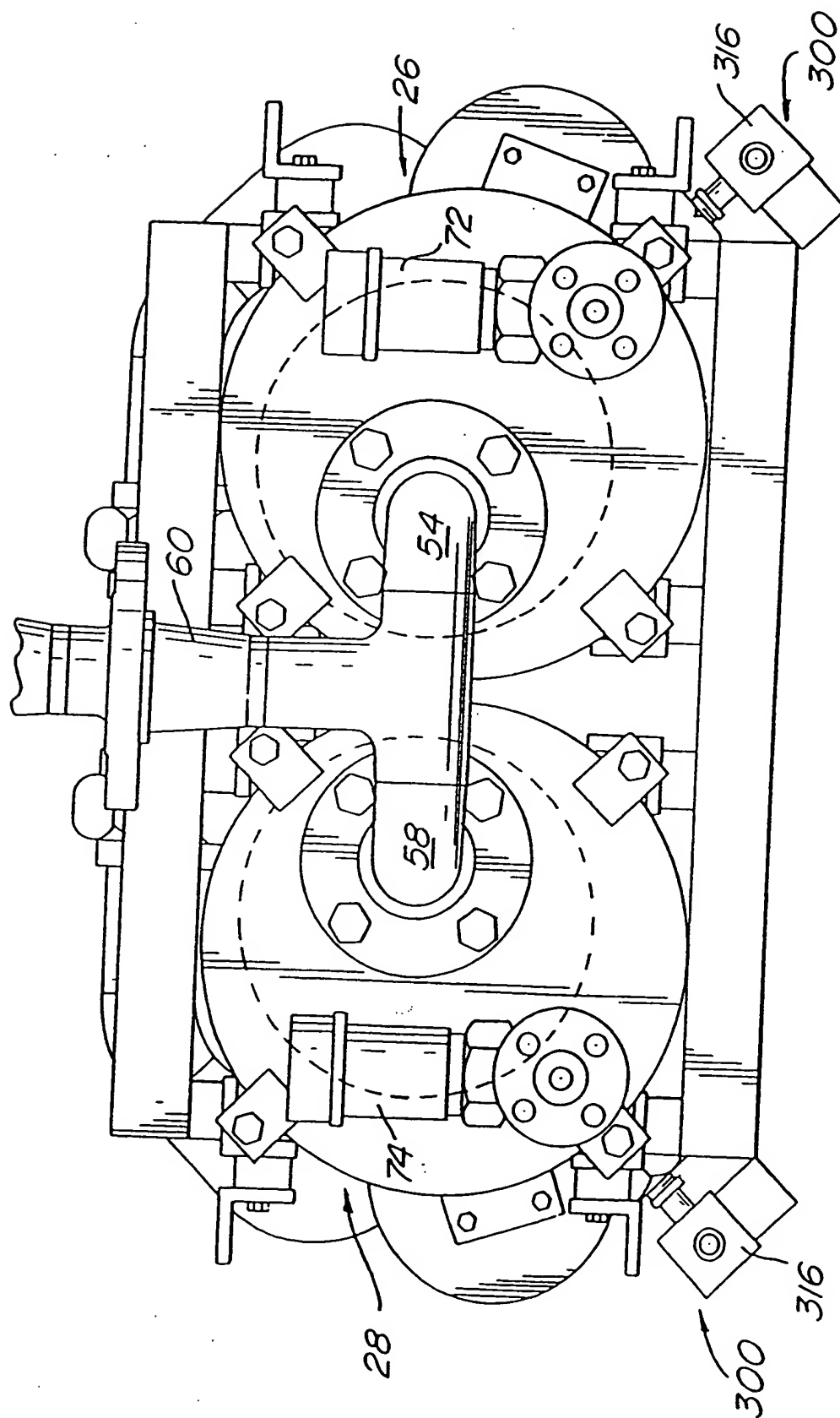


FIG. 4

FIG. 5

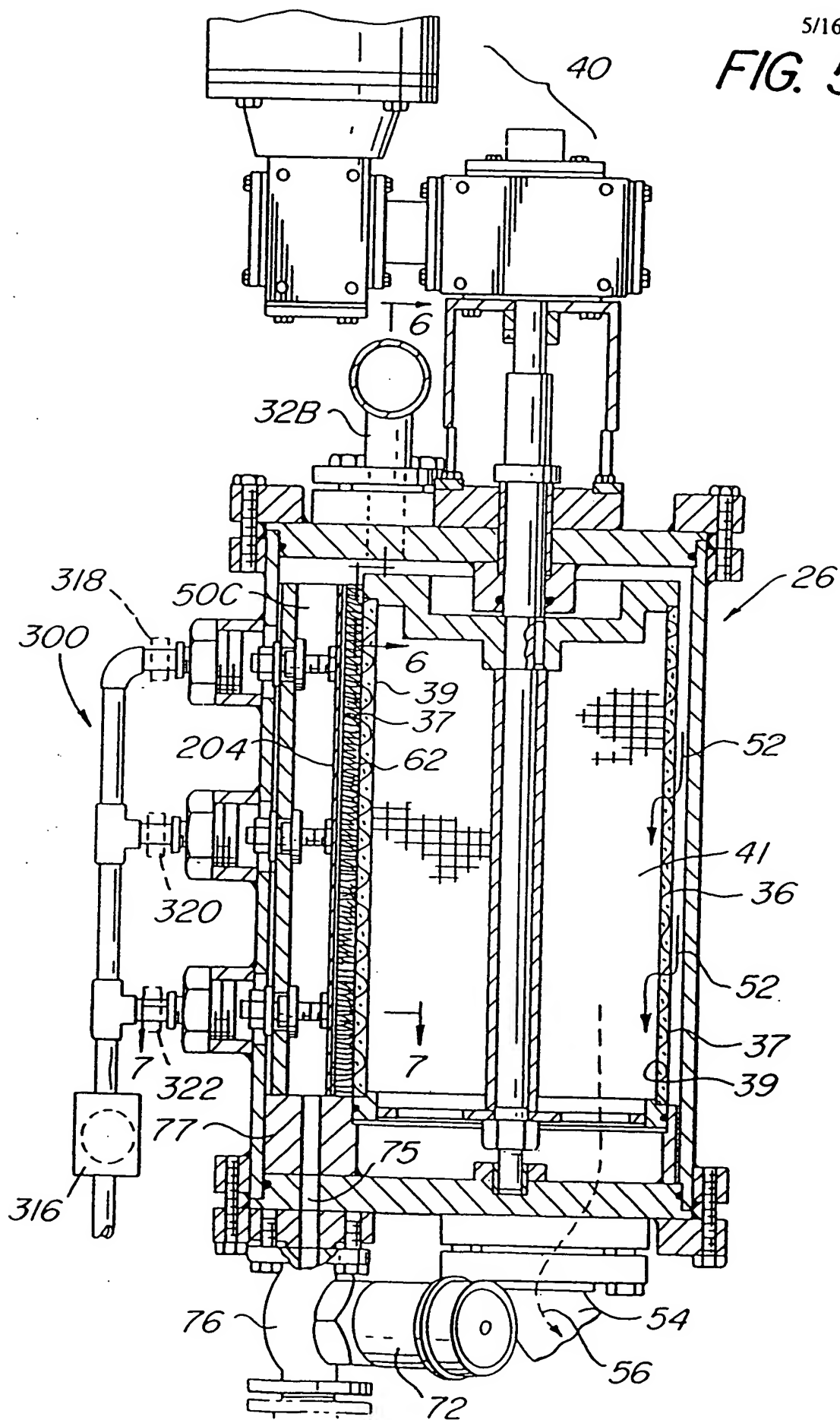


FIG. 6

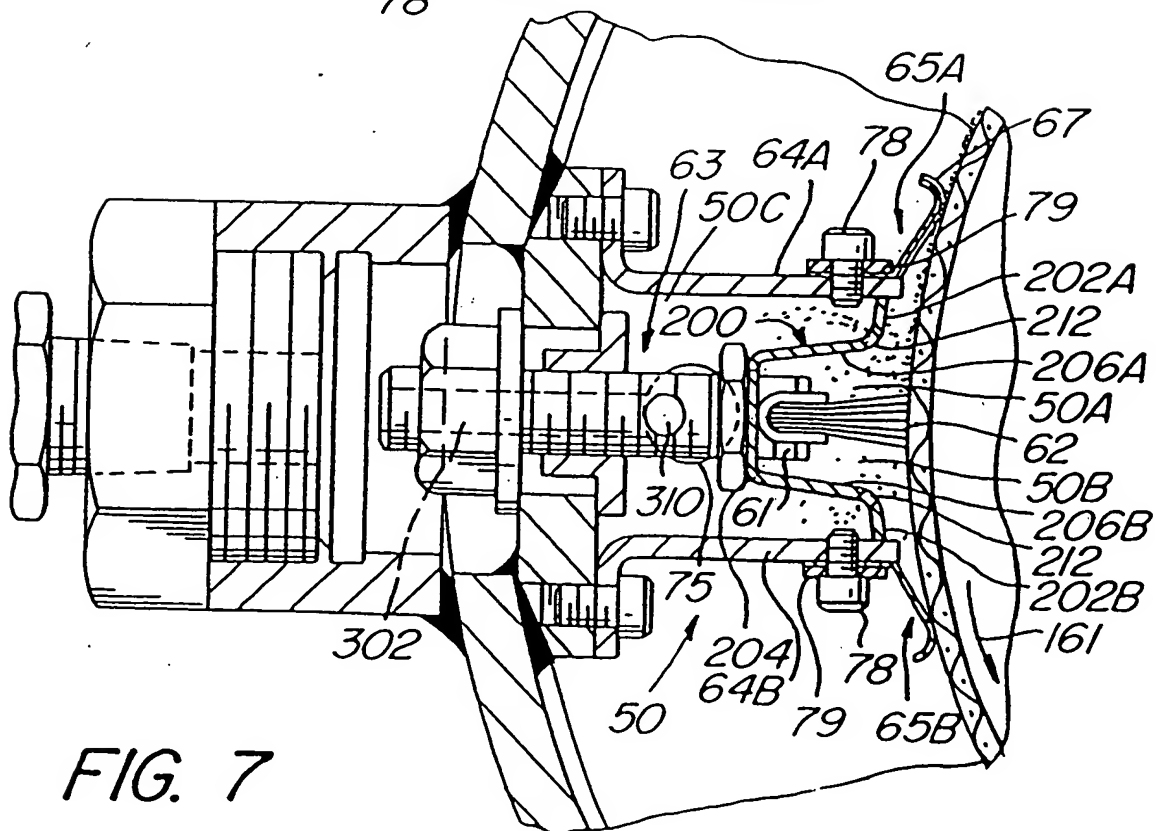
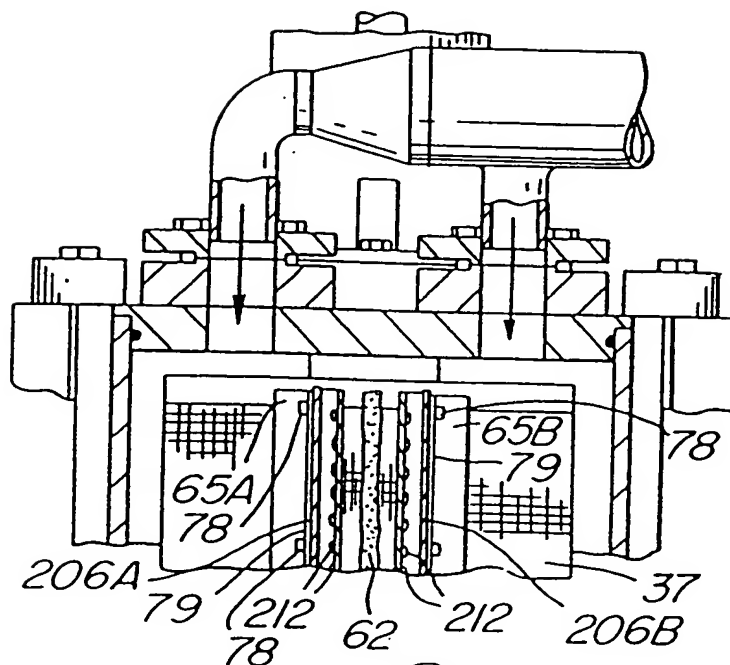


FIG. 7

FIG. 8

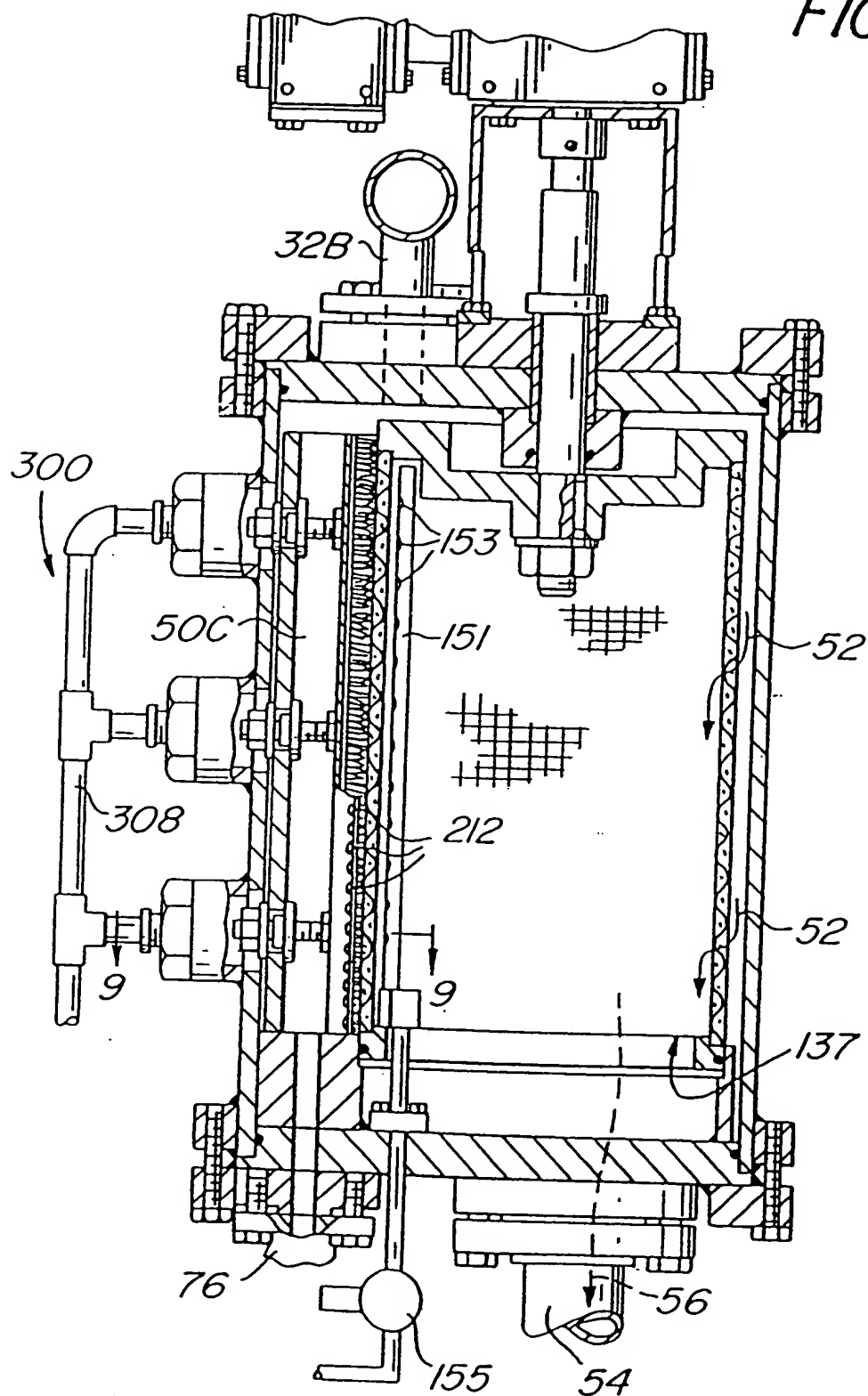


FIG. 9

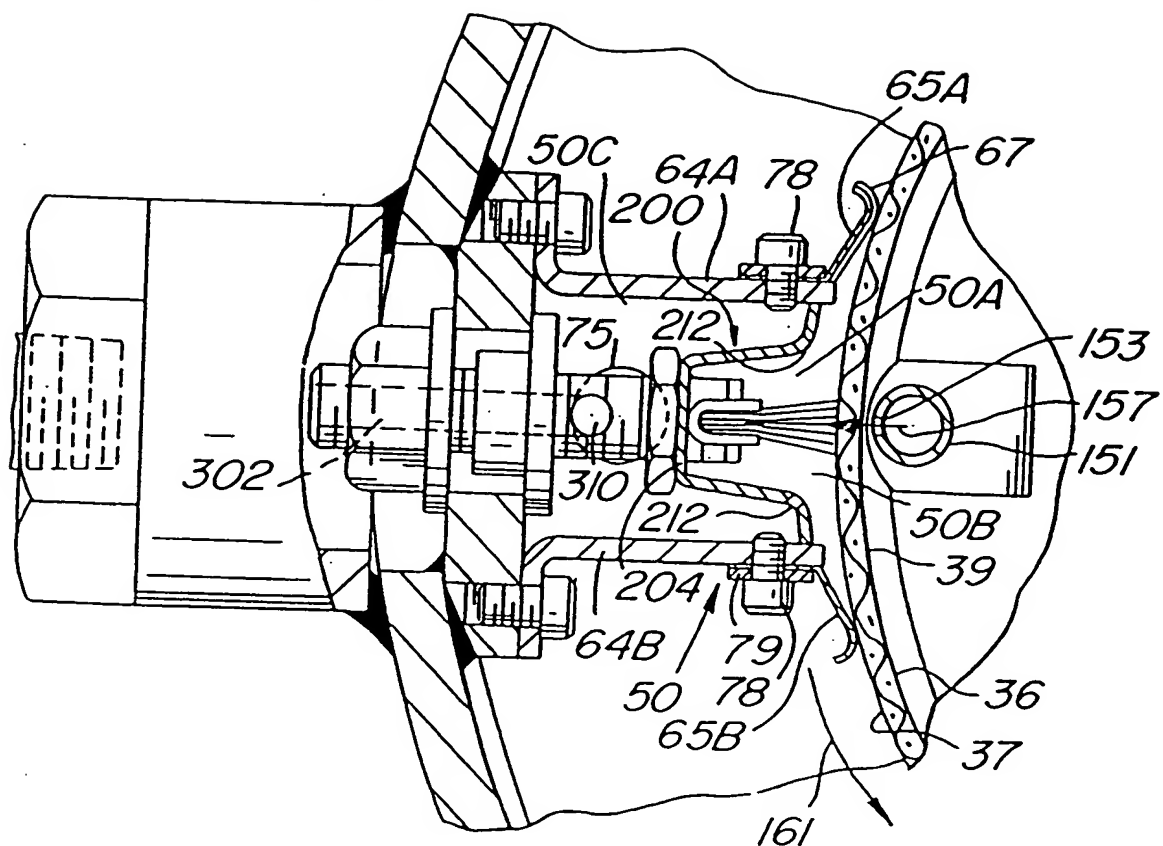


FIG. 10

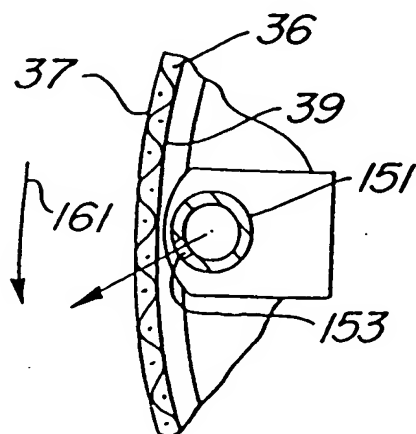


FIG. 11

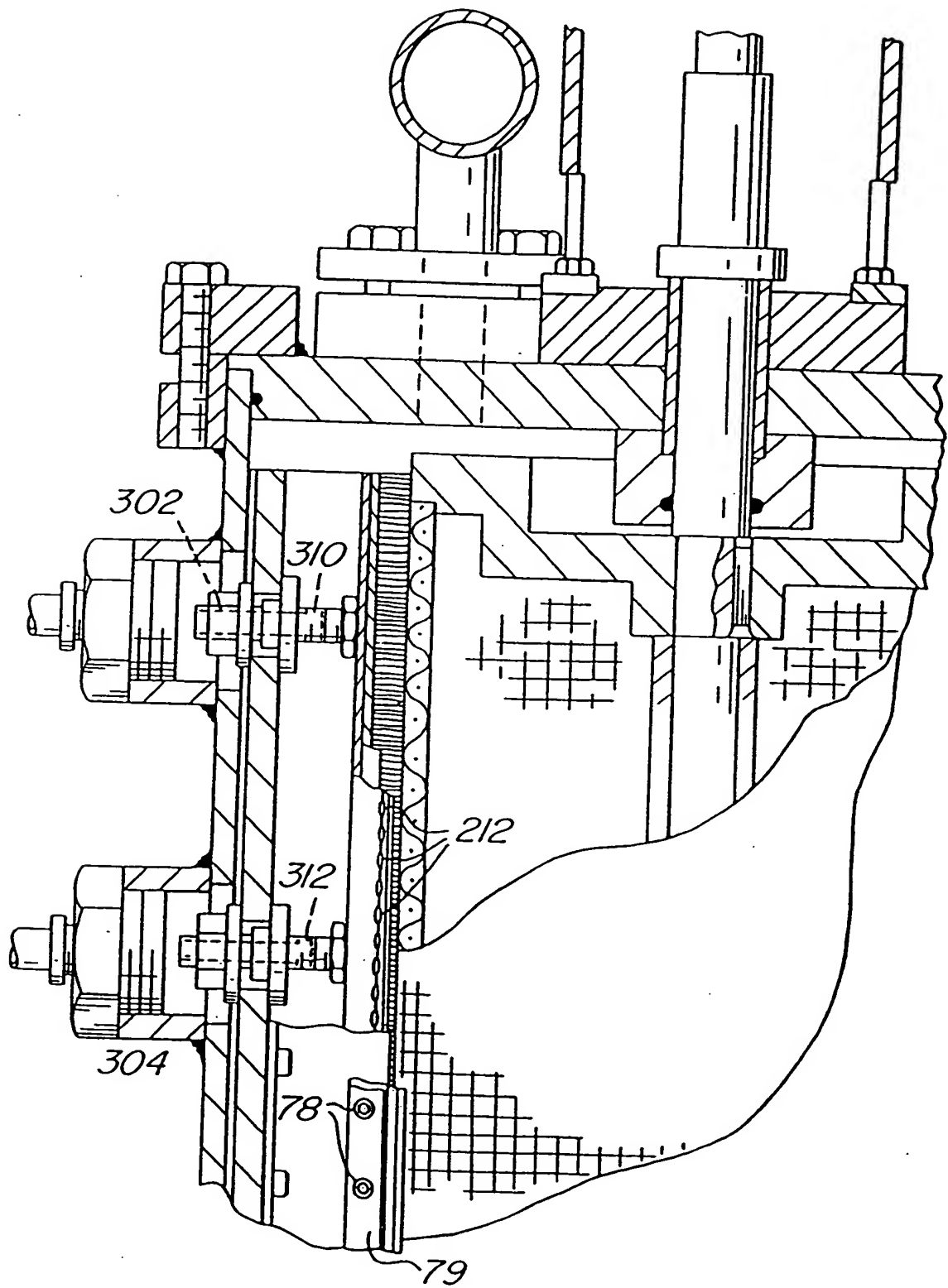
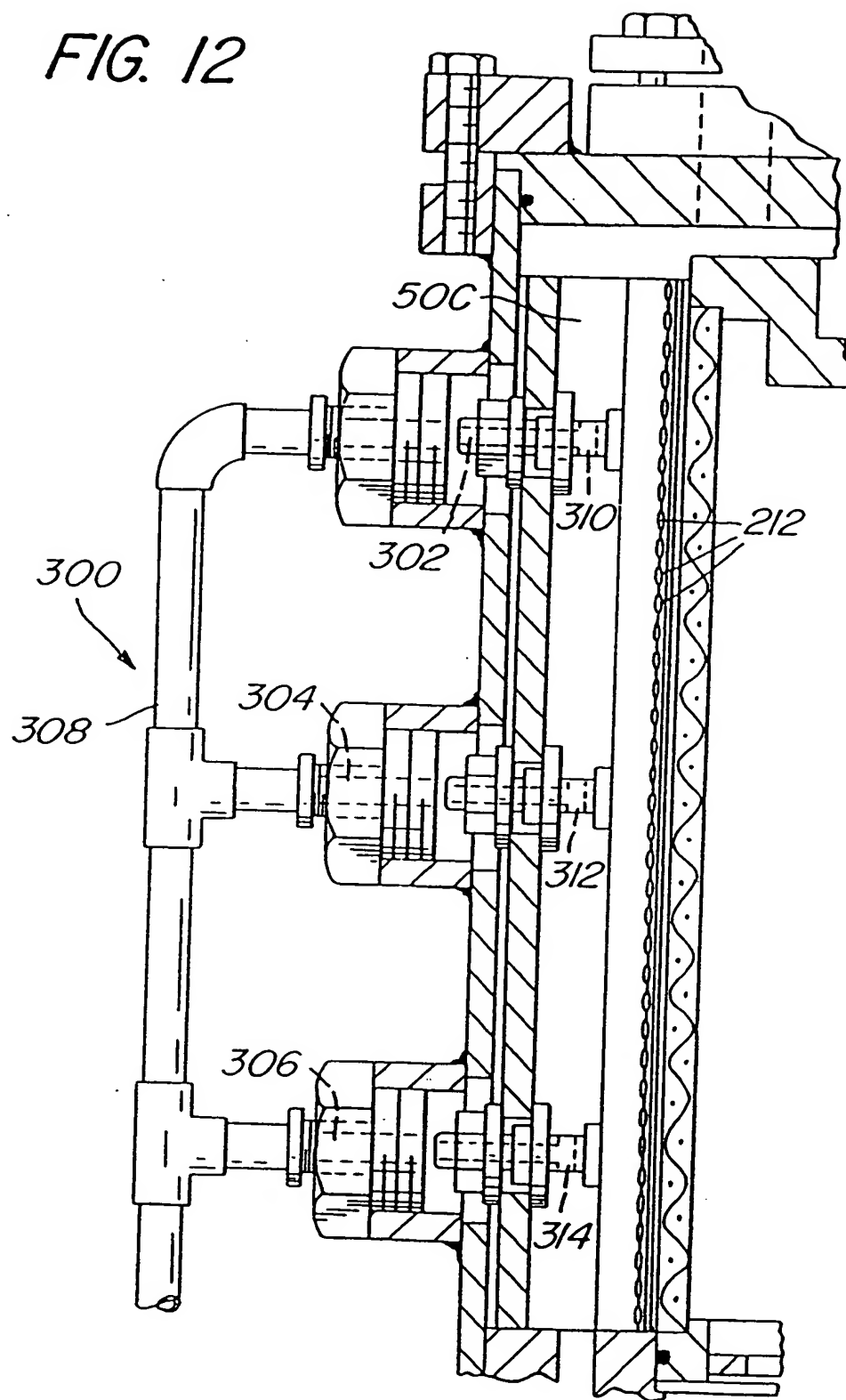


FIG. 12



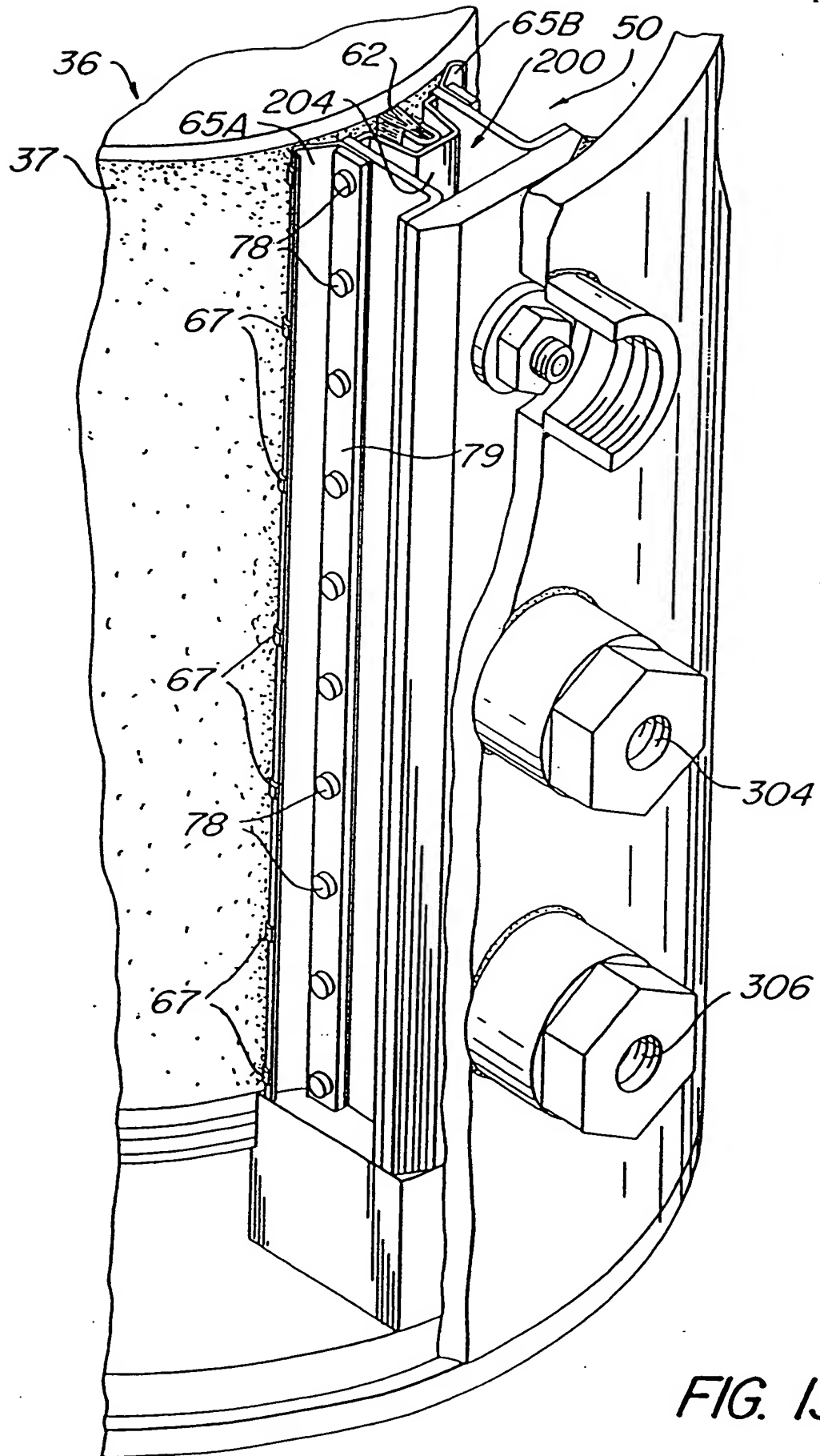


FIG. 13

FIG. 14

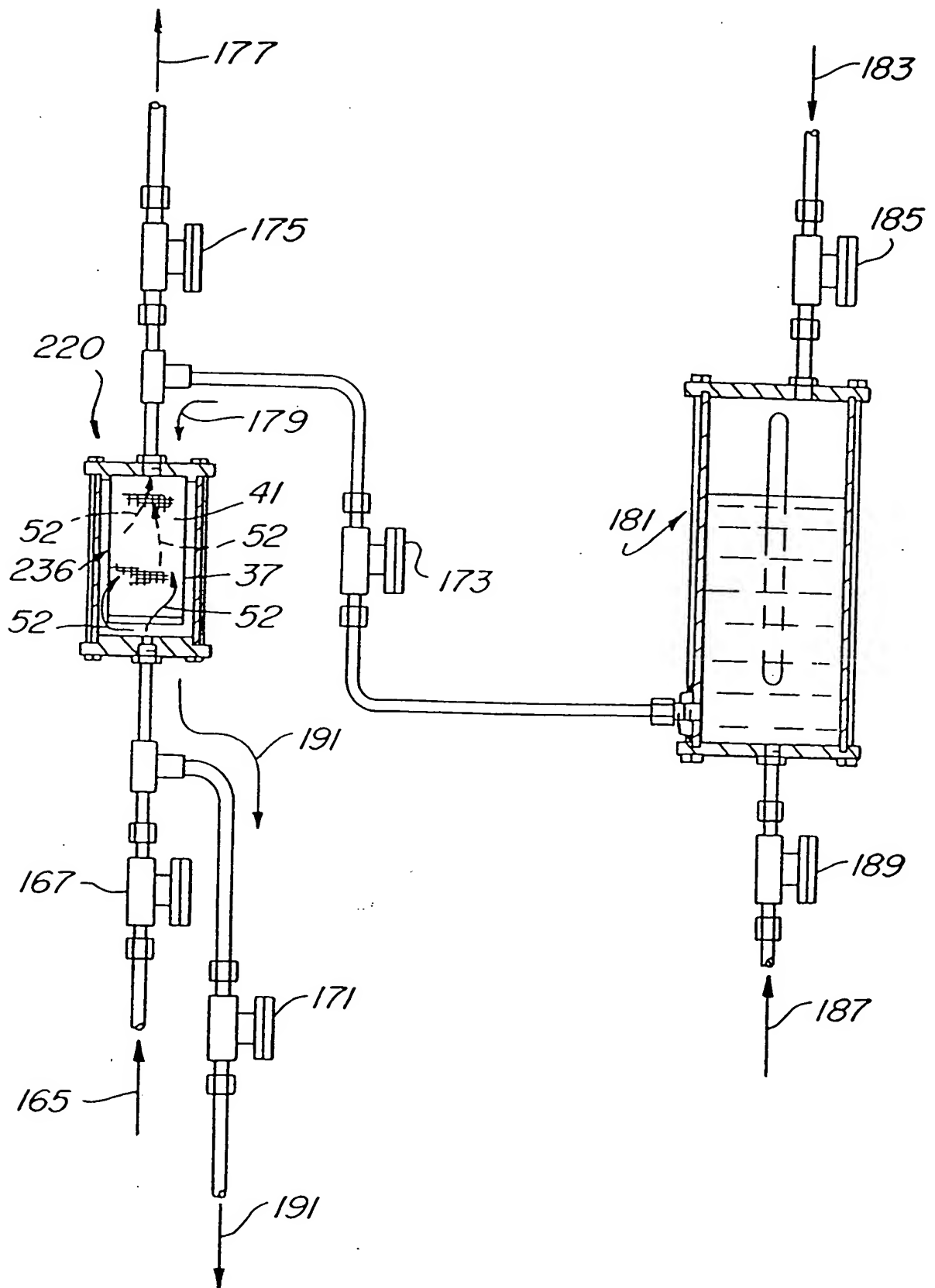


FIG. 15

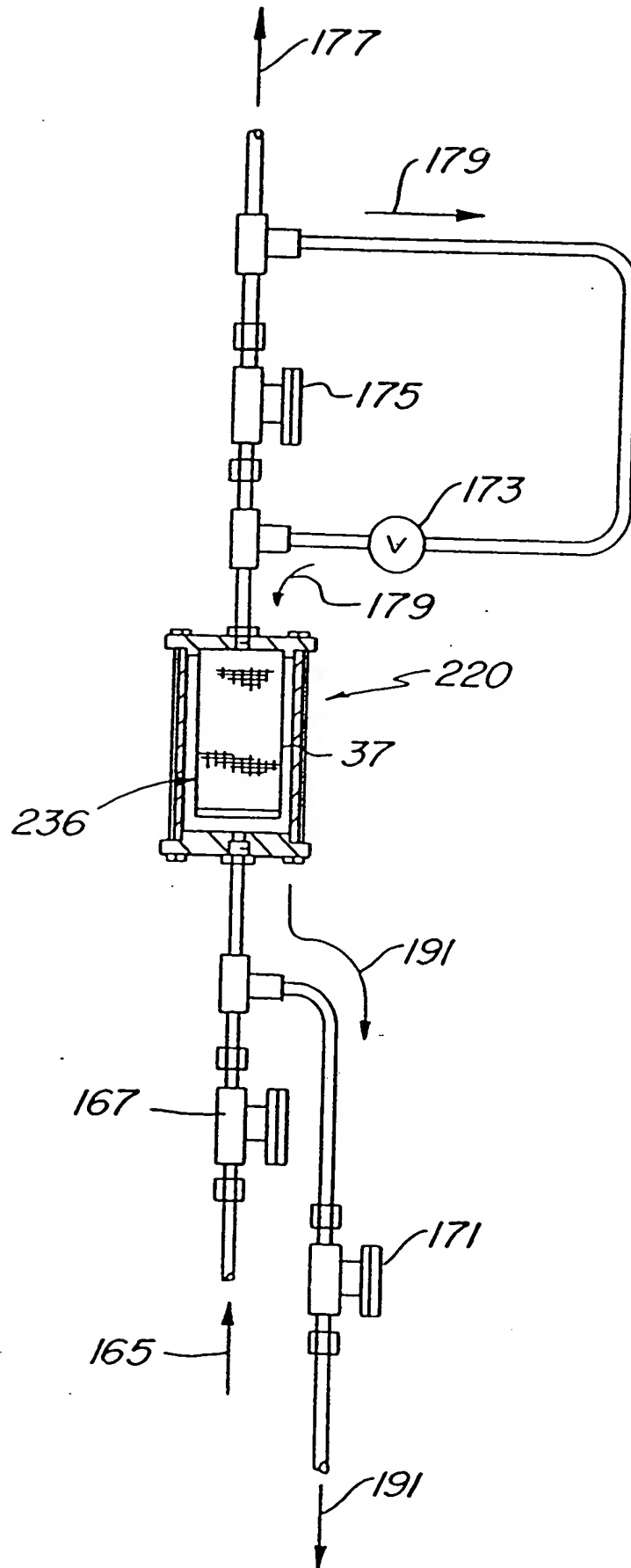


FIG. 16

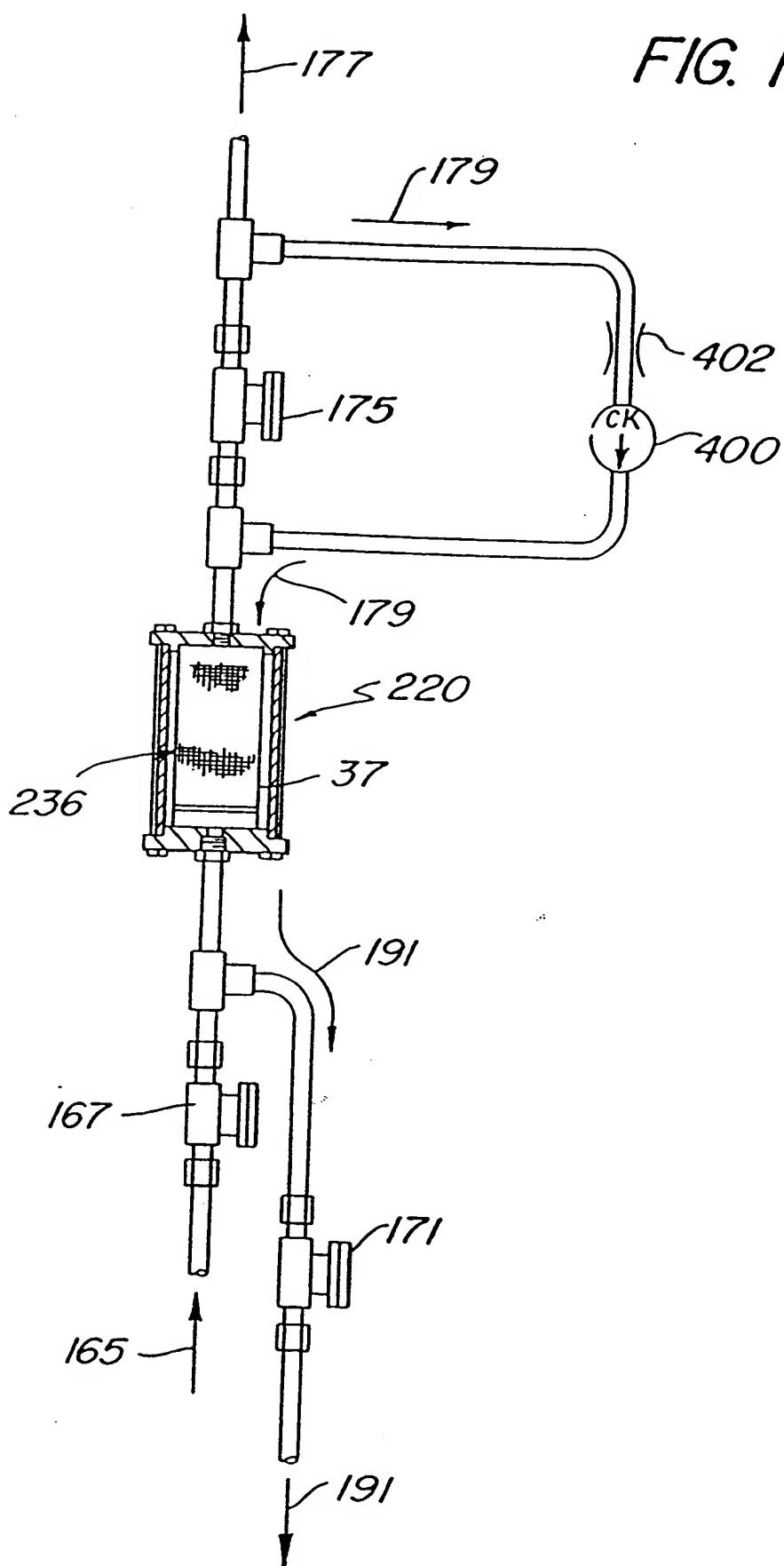
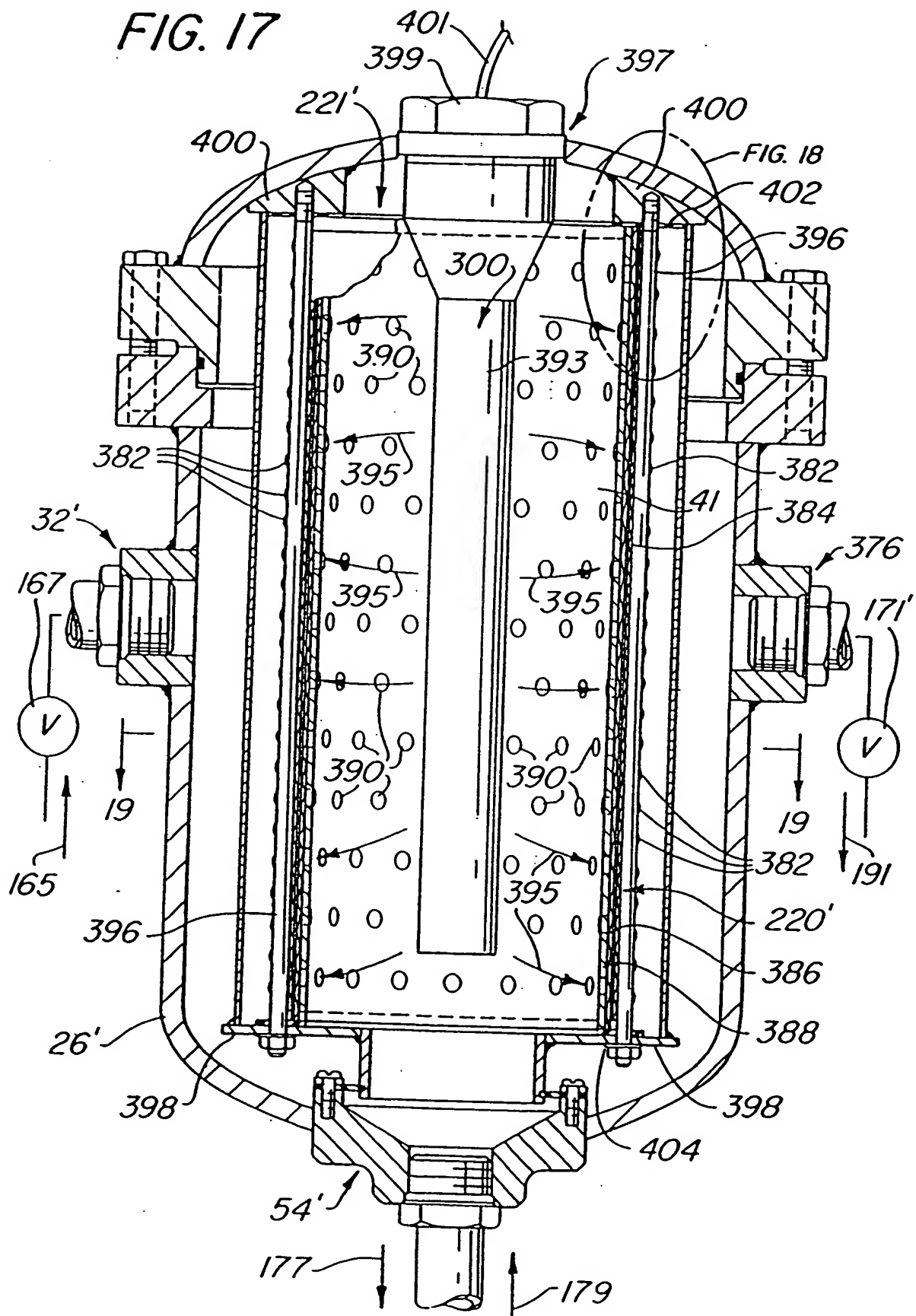


FIG. 17



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SELF-CLEANING FUEL OIL STRAINER

This invention relates generally to filter devices and, more particularly, to fuel system filters for small particulate contaminants.

It is well-known that the mechanical cleaning of a filter surface can be accomplished by having a brush or scraper drag along the filter surface where deposits have accumulated. In certain configurations, the brush or scraper is mounted at one end between two walls but with a significant portion of the brush or scraper projecting beyond the walls. Such configurations are shown in U.S. Patent Nos. 148,557 (Gillespie et al.); 556,725 (Farwell); 740,574 (Kohlmeyer) and 793,720 (Godbe). In conventional filter systems, the particulate contaminants are driven off the filter surface and are deposited in a hopper or tank along with the fluid being filtered, thus discarding large amounts of the fluid being filtered.

The use of a brush, or high speed cleaning spray, disposed between a pair of walls for cleaning a cylindrical filter is known in the art, as is disclosed in U.S. Patent Nos. 5,423,977 (Aoki et al.) and 5,595,655 (Steiner et al.) and Swiss Patent No. 22,863 (Zingg). Another variation employs a backwash that drives the particulate contaminants off of the cylindrical filter, as is disclosed in U.S. Patent No. 3,338,416 (Barry).

One desirable use for fuel oil filter systems of the present invention is in ships. Prior art ship fuel oil systems use conventional filter cartridges for cleaning the fuel in-line. However, these filter cartridges require frequent replacement which, in turn, requires the fuel flow to be interrupted during replacement. Interruption of the fuel oil flow will shut down the ship's main engines, thereby rendering the ship incapable of

maneuvering. This can be catastrophic where the ship is in tight quarters, e.g., during docking or navigating through narrow passageways, or during storms, or during battle with regard to warships. Furthermore, there are additional costs of having to store sufficient replacement cartridges onboard, the logistics involved in shipping and disposing the cartridges to and from the ship, and the labor costs involved in replacing the cartridges.

In addition, shipboard fuel oil straining is a specialized straining process. In particular, the fuel oil flow is initially pre-strained for gross particulate contaminants, such that any particulate contaminants remaining in the fuel oil flow are extremely small (e.g., < 100 microns, with a large percentage being less than 25 microns). As a result, where these small particulate contaminants are captured by a downstream strainer (e.g., a wedge wire screen strainer), both on and within the strainer surface, and then later dislodged during the strainer cleaning process, these extremely small particulate contaminants do not fall by gravity toward a drain but remain suspended in the fuel oil and will re-attach to the strainer surface. Therefore, there remains a need for a cleaning device that can dislodge such extremely small particulate contaminants off of the downstream strainer surface, as well as from within the strainer surface, and then ensure that these particulate contaminants flow out through the drain rather than re-attaching to the strainer surface.

Thus, there is a need for an improved system for removing undesired particulate contaminants from a fuel oil flow and without interrupting that fuel oil flow to the engines, while minimizing the amount of fluid removed therewith. It is to just such a system that the present invention is directed.

Accordingly, it is the general object of the instant invention to provide a fuel oil cleaning device that overcomes the problems of the prior art.

It is a further object of this invention to provide a fuel oil cleaning device that permits continuous fuel oil flow even during the cleaning process.

It is a further object of this invention to provide a fuel oil cleaning device that removes small particulate contaminants from a strainer surface, and from within the strainer surface, and ensures that when these small particulate contaminants are dislodged from the strainer during cleaning that they enter a drain rather than re-attaching to the strainer surface.

It is still yet another object of this invention to provide a fuel oil cleaning device that generates a high velocity flow of dislodged particulate contaminants away from the strainer and into a drain.

It is a further object of this invention to provide a fuel oil cleaning device that minimizes the amount of fuel oil that must be discarded during cleaning.

It is still yet a further object of this invention to eliminate the need for frequent replacement of the fuel oil filter.

It is still another object of this invention to minimize the costs associated with frequent fuel oil filter replacements.

It is still yet even another object of this invention to improve the efficiency of particulate removal.

It is still yet another object of this invention to provide a fuel oil filter that can be self-cleaned with the use of a reverse flow of clean fuel oil.

It is even yet another object of this invention to provide a self-cleaning fuel oil filter system that permits the fuel oil filter element to remain stationary during cleaning.

These and other objects of the invention are achieved by providing a fuel oil cleaning system disposed within a fuel oil flow having particulate contaminants therein. As mentioned earlier, the particulate contaminants that need to be removed from the fuel oil flow are extremely small, less than 100 microns, and a large percentage of these less than 25 microns, therefore do not settle out by gravity. The invention of the present application is well suited to removing these small particulate contaminants from the fuel oil flow and into a drain.

The fuel oil cleaning system comprises a fuel oil cleaning system for use with a fuel oil flow having particulate contaminants therein, said cleaning system comprising:

an inlet valve for controlling the fuel oil flow having particulate contaminants therein forming a contaminated fuel oil flow and wherein the contaminated fuel oil flow flows through a first output port of said inlet valve;

a stationary porous member positioned in the contaminated fuel oil flow that passes through said first output port, said contaminated fuel oil flow entering said stationary porous member through a first porous member surface and exiting through a second porous member surface towards a second output port, said contaminated fuel oil flow depositing the particulate contaminants on said first porous member surface to form a clean fuel oil flow that flows toward said second output port;

an ultrasonic generator adjacent to the stationary porous member which is operable during a portion of a cleaning process to facilitate dislodging particulate contaminants from the first porous member surface;

an outlet valve coupled to said second output port for controlling said clean fuel oil flow;

a flow control means, operated during a porous member cleaning process, having a flow control means input coupled to a source of clean fuel oil and a flow control means output coupled to said second output port, said flow control means controlling a reverse flow of said clean fuel oil that flows from said second porous member surface through said first porous member surface for dislodging the particulate contaminants from said first porous member surface to form a contaminated reverse flow of fuel oil;

The above invention also includes a method for cleaning a contaminated fuel oil flow having particulate contaminants therein. The method comprises the steps of:

positioning a stationary porous member in the contaminated fuel oil flow such that the contaminated fuel oil flow enters said stationary porous member through a first porous member surface and exits through a second porous member surface toward an output port, the contaminated fuel oil flow depositing the particulate contaminants on said first porous member surface;

disposing an ultrasonic generator adjacent said stationary porous member;

activating said ultrasonic generator during a portion of said cleaning process to facilitate dislodging the particulate contaminants from said first porous member surface;

isolating said stationary porous member from the contaminated fuel oil flow during a cleaning process;

passing a reverse flow of clean fuel oil from said output port and through said stationary porous member from said second porous surface member surface to said first porous member surface for dislodging the particulate contaminants from said first porous member surface to form a contaminated reverse flow of fuel oil;

opening a drain to receive said contaminated reverse flow of fuel oil;

discontinuing said reverse flow of clean fuel oil while closing said drain to complete said cleaning process; and

recoupling said stationary porous member to the contaminated fuel oil flow.

Other objects and many of the intended advantages of this invention will be readily appreciated when the same becomes better understood by reference to the following detailed description when considered in connection with the accompanying drawings wherein:

Fig. 1 is a block diagram of the fuel oil system in which the present invention is located;

Fig. 2 is a top view of the present invention;

Fig. 3 is a partial side view of the present invention;

Fig. 4 is a bottom view of the present invention;

Fig. 5 is a cross-sectional view of the present invention taken along line 5-5 of Fig. 2;

Fig. 6 is partial sectional view taken along line 6-6 of Fig. 5;

Fig. 7 is a partial sectional view taken along line 7-7 of Fig. 5;

Fig. 8 is a cross-sectional view of the present invention using a reverse flow of clean fuel oil as part of the particulate-removing means;

Fig. 9 is a partial sectional view taken along line 9-9 of Fig. 8;

Fig. 10 is similar to Fig. 9 except that a different reverse flow direction is depicted;

Fig. 11 is an enlarged, cross-sectional view of a portion of Fig. 5, depicting different portions of the partition and one of the associated wipers;

Fig. 12 is an enlarged, cross-sectional view of a portion of Fig. 5, depicting the passageways in the particulate-removing means support for use with the alternative drain configuration;

Fig. 13 is a partial isometric view of the internal particulate chamber depicting the partition and one of the wipers comprising the shoes;

Fig. 14 is a schematic of a fuel oil cleaning system using a stationary fuel oil strainer;

Fig. 15 is a variation of the fuel oil cleaning system of Fig. 14 wherein the downline fuel flow is used as the source of the reverse clean oil fuel flow;

Fig. 16 is another variation of the invention of Fig. 15;

Fig. 17 is a cross-sectional view of a stationary filter, that can be used in the systems shown in Figs. 14-16, and having an ultrasonic generator disposed therein;

Fig. 18 is an enlarged view of the circled portion shown in Fig. 17; and

Fig. 19 is a sectional view of the stationary filter taken along line 19-19 of Fig. 17.

The following is a detailed description of the present invention. The present invention has wide application where straining very small particulate contaminants, less than 100 microns and large percentage of these are less than 25 microns, from a fuel oil flow is required, and is not limited to the environment shown in Fig. 1, as will be discussed in detail below. The present invention is characterized as a non-disposable cleaning device, i.e., having a porous member that can be cleaned rather than being thrown away. The term non-disposable is defined as an item that does not require periodic replacement, e.g., once a day, week or month. Thus, such a non-disposable item has obvious advantages in environments where storage is limited and cleaning device replenishment facilities are unavailable, e.g., ocean-going vessels. Other example systems include power plants, cogeneration facilities, etc.

As an exemplary environment, Applicants have depicted a ship fuel oil system for disclosing the preferred embodiment. Referring now in greater detail to the various figures of the drawing, wherein like reference characters refer to like parts, there is shown in Fig. 1 at 20 an oil strainer of the present invention. The oil strainer 20 forms part of a compensated fuel system for use on watercraft, e.g., ships and boats. The compensated fuel oil system comprises a fuel oil service subsystem which includes a service tank 24 which is filled daily from a main fuel storage tank 22 with approximately one day's amount of fuel. The flow of fuel from the service tank 24 to the engine (which

in the preferred embodiment is either a gas turbine or a diesel engine) must be a continuous fuel oil flow, as defined above, in that any interruption in that flow will shut down the main engines of the ship, thereby rendering the ship incapable of maneuvering. As such, there cannot be any shutdown of the flow, even to clean a fuel oil filter located therein. To meet this requirement, the self cleaning fuel oil strainer 20 provides the means for filtering such a continuous fuel oil flow without interrupting that flow, as will be discussed below in detail.

As shown more clearly in Fig. 2, the fuel oil strainer 20 comprises two canisters 26 and 28 that are fed fuel oil from a common input manifold 30 (e.g., 2½ inch class 150 ANSI flanged input) at the top portion of the strainer 20. Each canister 26 and 28 has two inputs from the common manifold 30, as indicated by inputs 32A and 32B for canister 26 and by inputs 34A and 34B for canister 28. Each canister 26 and 28 comprises a cylindrical-shaped porous member 36 and 38, respectively, through which the fuel oil flows, as will be discussed in detail later. The porous members 36 and 38 comprise a screen selected from the group consisting of wedge wire, wire cloth and perforated metal. In the preferred embodiment, the porous members 36 and 38 comprise wedge wire screens, such as those manufactured by Leem Filtration Products, Inc. of Mahwah, New Jersey. It is also within the broadest scope of the present invention that the porous members 36 and 38 may comprise wire cloth or perforated metal, as opposed to wedge wire screens. One of the main features of the oil strainer 20 is its ability to filter out fine particulate matter, e.g., particulates less than 100 microns, where a large percentage of these are less than 25 microns.

Drive mechanisms 40 and 42 (Fig. 3) are provided to rotate the respective porous members 36 and 38 during the cleaning process about their respective center axes,

only one (44) of which is clearly shown in Fig. 5. Otherwise, during normal operation, the porous members 36 and 38 remain stationary.

As can be seen in Fig. 2, fuel oil enters each canister through its respective inputs and then flows around the periphery of each porous member 36 and 38; in particular, fuel oil flow from inputs 32A and 32B are shown by arrows 46A and 46B, respectively, and fuel oil flow from inputs 34A and 34B are shown by arrows 48A and 48B, respectively. The inputs 32A and 32B are located on both sides of an internal particulate chamber 50 (Fig. 7, which comprises two dislodge subchambers 50A/50B and a drain subchamber 50C, all of which are discussed later) in canister 26; similarly, although not shown, the inputs 34A and 34B in canister 28 are also located on both sides of a internal particulate chamber, also comprising two dislodge subchambers and a drain subchamber. Thus, fuel oil input flow moves away from the chamber 50 and around the periphery of the porous members 36 and 38 and then through them, as is discussed next.

Fuel oil flow through the porous member is more easily depicted in Fig. 5, which is a cross-sectional view of the canister 26, although it should be understood that the following discussion is applicable to the other canister 28. The main fuel oil flow is through the porous member 36, from an outside surface 37 to an inside surface 39, as indicated by the arrows 52, and down through the hollow interior 41 of the porous member 36. As the fuel oil then flows through the porous member 36, particulate contaminants are then trapped against the outer surface 37 of the porous member 36. The filtered fuel oil exits into a main output 54 of the canister, as shown by the arrow 56. Fig. 4 is a bottom view of both canisters 26 and 28 and it shows the main output 54 of canister 26 and a main output 58 of canister 28 feeding into a common output manifold 60. Thus, fuel oil flow through the strainer 20 is basically continuous.

When cleaning of the porous member 36 and 38 is required, as indicated by pressure drop across the strainer 20 (as measured by a pressure transducer, not shown), the drive mechanisms 40 and 42 are activated to rotate the respective porous members. In addition, solenoid valves 72 and 74 (Fig. 3) are activated to open respective drains (only one 76 of which is shown in Fig. 5), located directly below the drain subchamber 50C, for diverting the particulate debris and a limited amount fuel oil down through a respective drain, rather than through the main outlets 54 and 58. Furthermore, it is within the broadest scope of this invention to include other alternative locations for the drain, e.g., along the chamber, rather than under it, as will be discussed in detail later. Opening of the drain 76 (or the alternative drain) is kept to a minimum to discard as little fuel as possible while flushing the particulate contaminants from the chamber. Thus, for example, the drain 76 can be open all or any part of the time that the porous members 36 and 38 are rotating.

Cleaning of the porous members 36 and 38 is accomplished by the particulate-removing means, only one of which is shown most clearly in Figs. 5, 7, 8 and 9; as such, the following discussion applies to the particulate-removal means in the canister 28 also. In the preferred embodiment, the particulate-removing means comprises an elongated wire brush 62 that spans the length of the porous member 36. The brush fibers are in contact with the outside surface 37 of the porous screen 36 and thus bear on the outside surface 37 of the porous member 36 along its entire length. The brush 62 forms the separation between the two dislodge subchambers 50A and 50B, while the majority of a brush support 63 is disposed inside the drain subchamber 50C, as shown in Fig. 7.

As mentioned previously, the chamber 50 comprises the two dislodge subchambers 50A/50B and a drain subchamber 50C. The chamber 50 comprises a pair of confining

walls 64A and 64B, also running the length of the porous member 36, that enclose the brush 62/brush support 63. The purpose of these walls 64A and 64B is to contain the dislodged particulate debris within the chamber 50 so that substantially only fuel oil within this chamber 50 will be discharged through the drain 76 (or alternative drain 300, to be discussed later) during cleaning. A partition 200, also running the length of the porous member 36, forms the separation between the two dislodge subchambers 50A/50B and the drain subchamber 50C. The partition 200 itself comprises a pair of outer flanges 202A/202B, a base wall 204 and sidewalls 206A/206B. The base wall 204 is secured between a particulate-removing means (e.g., brush 62 or scraper) head 61 and the particulate-removing means support 63. At the bend between the sidewalls 206A/206B and the outer flanges 202A/202B, the partition 200 comprises a plurality of apertures 212 (Figs. 7, 9, 11 and 12) that permit the passage of dislodged particulate contaminants from the two dislodge subchambers 50A/50B to the drain subchamber 50C. Because of the size of the apertures 212 (e.g., 0.094" diameter), once any particulate contaminants from the two dislodge subchambers 50A/50B make their way through the partition 200, there is very little chance that such particulate contaminants can find their way back through the apertures 212 and ultimately return to the outer surface 37.

A drain passageway 75, through a strainer support housing 77, is also shown in Figs. 5. Figs. 7 and 9 also show the passageway 75 in phantom.

At the extreme ends of the confining walls 64A and 64B, respective wipers 65A and 65B are secured to the outside surfaces of the walls 64A and 64B, respectively, and which also run the length of the porous member 36. The wipers 65A and 65B (e.g., 316 stainless steel, half-hard) are coupled to the ends of the walls 64A and 64B using fasteners 78 and plates 79. As can be seen most clearly in Fig. 13, wiper 65A

comprises a plurality of spaced-apart shoes or runners 67 that are in contact with the outer surface 37 of the porous member 36. These shoes 67 (e.g., 0.010" - 0.015" thickness and 1/4" wide and which may be spot-welded to the wiper 65A) serve to maintain the wiper 65A a sufficient distance away from the outer surface 37 such that during cleaning, while the porous member 36 is rotating (direction of rotation is shown by the arrow 161 in Fig. 7), the particulate contaminants adhering to the outer surface 37 pass beneath the wiper 65A between the shoes and then are driven off of the outer surface 37 by the particulate-removing means 62 and into the dislodge subchamber 50A. The drain subchamber 50C is in direct fluid communication with the drain 76 (or alternative drain 300). When the drain 76 (or alternative drain 300) is open, any particulate contaminants suspended in the dislodge subchamber 50A are pulled toward the apertures 212 in the partition 200 and pass through them and out to the drain 76 (or 300).

Any remaining particulate contaminants which cannot be mechanically driven off of the surface 37 by the brush 62, e.g., particulate contaminants lodged in between the outer surface 37 and the inside surface 39 of the porous member 36 (e.g., lodged in the wedge wire cells of a porous member 36 comprising wedge wire), are subjected to a reverse pressure and are driven out of the surface 37 into the second dislodge subchamber 50B. In particular, unlike the first dislodge subchamber 50A which is not totally closed off since the wiper 65A stands off from the outside surface 37 of the porous member 36, the second dislodge subchamber 50B forms a completely-closed off chamber because the wiper 65B does not include shoes and, therefore, is in contact with the outer surface 37 along its entire length. Thus, the second dislodge subchamber 50B is subjected completely to the influence of the pressure differential created between the inside surface 39 of the porous member 36 and the opened drain pressure which is present in the drain subchamber 50C, via the apertures 212. When

the drain 76 (or 300) is open, these particulate contaminants, lodged in between the outer surface 37 and the inside surface 39 of the porous member 36, are driven out of that region by the reverse pressure differential and then are suspended in the second dislodge subchamber 50B; this pressure differential also pulls these particulate contaminants toward the apertures 212 in the partition 200 and into the drain subchamber 50C for passage through the drain 76 (or 300).

As pointed out earlier, the particulate contaminants are of an extremely small size, less than 100 microns, and a large percentage of these are less than 25 microns; as a result, these particulate contaminants do not settle out by gravity into the drain but rather, due to their small size, remain suspended in the fuel oil. The invention of the present application is well suited to overcome this problem as described below.

It should be understood that the apertures 212 provide for fluid communication between the first dislodge subchamber 50A and the drain subchamber 50C and for fluid communication between the second dislodge subchamber 50B and the drain subchamber 50C. However, because the apertures 212 are small, they maintain a high velocity of particulate contaminants from both the first and second dislodge subchambers 50A and 50B into the drain subchamber 50C under the influence of the reverse pressure differential. Such a high velocity cannot be sustained by replacing the apertures 212 with a slot. Furthermore, replacing the apertures 212 with a slot would defeat the purpose of maintaining the transferred particulate contaminants (i.e., particulate contaminants that have passed from the dislodge subchambers 50A/50B) in the drain chamber 50B since the particulate contaminants would not be precluded from making their way back to the outer surface 37 of the porous member 36.

In particular, the advantage of using the plurality of apertures, as opposed to a slot of the type shown in U.S. Patent No. 5,595,655 (Steiner et al.), is that the plurality of apertures provides for a rapid flow velocity as opposed to a low flow velocity for the slot. For example, if there are 21 apertures that form one set of apertures in the partition 200, each having a diameter of approximately 0.094", then the total area is approximately

$$\pi (0.094"/2)^2 \times 21 = 0.1457 \text{ in}^2.$$

If, on the other hand, a slot having a width of 0.094" and a length of 12.594" (i.e., the length from the top of the uppermost aperture in the partition 200 to the bottom-most aperture in the partition 200; this is a reasonable assumption since the Steiner et al. patent states that the slot is substantially equal to the scraper length-Steiner et al. patent, col. 1, lines 61-62) is used, the area is 1.184 in². Thus, using a plurality of apertures presents only 1/8 the area of the slot. As a result, for a given flow rate (gallons/minute), the slot may provide flow velocity of 1 ft/sec whereas the apertured partition generates a flow velocity of 8 ft/sec. The higher velocity significantly reduces the chance that a particulate will migrate backwards through the plurality of apertures and re-attach to the porous surface 36.

It is also within the broadest scope of the present invention to include an alternative drain 300 configuration as shown most clearly in Figs. 5, 8 and 12. To that end, a drain 300 is depicted along side the drain subchamber 50C rather than disposed underneath the subchamber 50C, as discussed previously. The drain 300 comprises drain passageways 302, 304 and 306 that form a portion of the particulate-removing means support 63. The passageways 302-306 are coupled at one end to a common manifold 308 through which the dislodged particulate contaminants are disposed of. As shown in Fig. 12, the other end of each passageway 302-306 comprises a respective cross

hole 310, 312, and 314 disposed in the drain subchamber 50B. Thus, when a drain solenoid valve 316 (Fig. 5) is activated as discussed previously, particulate matter that has been dislodged from the outer surface 37 of the porous members 36/38 into the two dislodge subchambers 50A/50B, passes through the apertures 212 in the partition 200 into the drain chamber 50B. From there, the dislodged particulate contaminants are driven into the cross holes 310-314, through the passageways 302-306 and then into the common manifold 308. Thus, particulate contaminants dislodged from the outer surface 37 of the porous members 36/38 would be driven into the alternative drain 300.

Alternatively, instead of using a single solenoid valve 316, it is within the broadest scope of this invention to include dedicated solenoid valves 318, 320 and 322 (Fig. 5) that individually couple respective passageways 302-306 to the common manifold 308.

It is also within the broadest scope of the present invention that the term particulate-removing means include a brush, a scraper, or any equivalent device that is used to dislodge particulate contaminants from the outside surface 37 of the porous members 36 and 38. For example, where larger particulate contaminants are to be filtered from the fuel oil flow, a scraper (not shown) can be used in place of the brush 62.

As shown in Fig. 1, the oil strainer 20 can also be used in the fuel oil transfer subsystem portion of the compensated fuel oil system, with a few modifications. For example, the input 31 and the output 61 of the oil strainer 20 used in the fuel oil transfer subsystem would be greater in size (as compared to the input 30 and output 60 of the oil strainer 20 used in the fuel oil service system discussed previously) to accommodate the larger fuel flow in that subsystem. In addition, the porous members 36 and 38 may need to only filter out particulate matter as small as 25 microns. In all

other aspects, the oil strainer 20 used in the fuel oil transfer subsystem is similar to the oil strainer 20 used in the fuel oil service system. (The fuel oil transfer subsystem comprises the main fuel storage tank 22 in which sea water is used to replace fuel used).

It is also within the broadest scope of the present invention that the particulate-removing means also encompasses a reverse flow of clean fuel oil for dislodging the particulate contaminants from the fuel oil filter; or a reverse flow of clean fuel oil in combination with the particulate-removing member (e.g., brush or scraper), discussed previously.

In particular, as shown in Figs. 8-10, a second embodiment of the present invention comprises a particulate-removing means that includes an elongated spraying element 151 comprising a plurality of ports 153. The elongated spraying element 151 is coupled to a pressure source 155 (e.g., a pump, air supply, etc.) that recirculates clean fuel oil (whose flow is indicated by the arrow 56) into the elongated spraying element 151, during cleaning only, to create a high energy fuel oil spray that emanates from each of the ports 153. As shown most clearly in Fig. 9, the direction of the high energy spray (indicated by the arrow 157) is from the inside surface 39 to the outside surface 37 of the porous member 136. Thus, as the porous member 36 is rotated (direction indicated by the arrow 161) during cleaning, the high energy spray drives the particulate contaminants from the outside surface 39 into the dislodge subchamber 50B.

It should be understood that the particulate-removing means may comprise the elongated spraying element 151 alone for driving off the particulate contaminants, or the particulate-removing means may comprise a particulate-removing member (e.g., a

brush 62 or scraper) in addition to the elongated spraying element 151, as shown in Figs. 8-9. Together, the elongated spraying element 151 and the particulate-removing member (e.g., brush 62 or scraper) act to dislodge the particulate contaminants from the outside surface 37 of the porous member 36 during cleaning. When the particulate-removing member (e.g., a brush 62 or scraper) is used in combination with the elongated spraying element 151, the direction of the high energy spray (indicated by the arrow 163) may be set to occur after the particulate-removing member dislodges some of the particulate contaminants (Fig. 10), thereby driving particulate contaminants into the second dislodge subchamber 50B.

The porous member 36, for use in this second embodiment, comprises an open lower end 137 (Fig. 8) to permit passage of the elongated spraying element 151 therethrough.

Another variation of the self-cleaning fuel oil filter that utilizes a reverse flow of clean fuel oil for cleaning purposes is depicted at 220 in Fig. 14. In particular, as indicated by the arrow 165, during normal operation, contaminated fuel oil enters through an inlet valve 167 to a fuel oil filter 220. During normal operation, a drain valve 171 and a purge valve 173 remain closed, as will be discussed in detail later. The fuel oil filter 220 comprises a porous member 236, preferably having a wire cloth configuration. The direction of the fuel oil flow through the porous member 236 is given by the arrows 52 and is similar to the flow for the porous members discussed previously, i.e., from an outside surface 37 of the porous member 236 to an inside surface (not shown) of the porous member 236 and then through the center portion 41 of the porous member 236. The cleaned fuel oil is then passed through an outlet valve 175 in the direction of the arrow 177.

The cleaning process for the fuel oil filter 220 is different from the previous embodiments in that the porous member 236 does not move during cleaning. Instead, a reverse flow of clean fuel oil (the direction of this reverse flow is given by the arrow 179) is injected down through the center of the porous member 236, from the inside surface to the outside surface 37 of the porous member 236. This reverse flow of clean fuel oil impacts the entire inside surface of the porous member 236 and flows to the outside surface 37 of the porous member 236, thereby dislodging the particulate contaminants from the outside surface 37 of the porous member 236. Since this reverse flow acts through the entire porous member 236, there are no confining walls used. Thus, in this embodiment, the particulate removal means comprises only the reverse flow of clean fuel oil. Because this reverse flow of clean fuel oil is applied through the entire porous member 236, the fuel oil filter 220 must be isolated from the normal fuel oil flow during cleaning, as will be discussed in detail below.

In particular, when cleaning is required, the inlet valve 167 and outlet valve 175 are closed and the purge valve 173 and drain valve 171 are opened. The purge valve 173 is coupled to a clean fuel reservoir 181 which is under pressure (e.g., an air supply, whose input flow is indicated by the arrow 183 and having a valve 185 for maintaining air pressure in the reservoir 181. The downstream clean fuel, indicated by the arrow 187, enters the reservoir 181 through a recharge valve 189). When the purge valve 173 and the drain valve are opened, the reverse flow of clean fuel oil 179 drives the particulate contaminants off of the outside surface 37 of the porous member 236; this reverse flow, now containing the dislodged particulate contaminants, flows out, as indicated by the arrow 191, through the drain valve 171. Once this flow of dislodged particulate contaminants passes to the drain, the purge valve 173 and the drain valve 171 are closed and the input valve 167 and the output valve 175 are opened, restoring normal fuel oil flow.

It should be understood that the continuous fuel oil flow is accomplished by having a plurality (e.g., five to eight) parallel, non-rotating filter paths (not shown) that are coupled to the reservoir 181 through respective purge valves 173. Thus, when any one non-rotation filter path is being cleaned using the reverse fuel oil flow, the remaining parallel channels are operating under the normal fuel oil flow.

Another variation of this embodiment, depicted in Fig. 15, uses the downstream clean fuel oil directly to create the reverse fuel oil flow. In particular, the purge valve 173 is coupled directly to the downstream clean fuel oil flow. The sequence of valve openings/closings are similar to that described previously. Thus, when the purge valve 173 and the drain valve 171 are opened a pressure differential is created and the reverse flow of clean fuel oil, the direction indicated by the arrow 179, is generated directly from the downstream clean fuel oil flow.

Another variation of this embodiment is shown in Fig. 16 that uses passive components such as a check valve 400 and a flow restricting orifice 402 in place of the purge valve 173.

It should also be understood that the variations of Figs. 15 and 16, like that discussed with regard to Fig. 14, also comprise a plurality of parallel, non-rotating filter paths that permit the continuous flow of fuel oil when any one of the parallel, non-rotating filter paths is being cleaned by the reverse flow of clean fuel oil.

Figs. 17-19 depict an exemplary stationary filter 220 , having an ultrasonic generator 300 disposed therein, that can be used in the systems shown in Figs. 14-16 and, more preferably, to the systems of Fig. 15-16.

Before proceeding with a discussion of Figs. 17-19, it should be understood that in Figs. 14-16, the input flow 165 is shown in an upward direction from the bottom of the page toward the outlet flow 177 shown at the top of the page, for clarity only. The actual flow of any of the systems shown in Fig. 14-16 is exemplary only and may be in any number of directions and, therefore, is not limited to those depicted in those figures. Thus, the orientation of the stationary filter 220 shown in Figs. 17-19 is simply inverted from that shown in Figs. 14-16. Thus, the "top surface" 221 in Fig. 17 corresponds to the "bottom" surface 221 shown in Figs. 14-16.

As will also be discussed in detail later, the input line into the stationary filter 220 is from the side of the canister 26, at an input port 32, rather than from the "bottom" surface 221 shown in Figs. 14-16; the reason for this will also be discussed later. In addition, a dedicated drain port 376 passes the dislodged particulate contaminants away from the stationary filter 220 to a drain (not shown). Because of these port configurations, the input tee 291 in the systems of Figs. 14-16 is eliminated.

As shown in Fig. 17, the stationary filter 220 is housed in the canister 26. On one side of the canister 26 is the input port 32 while on the other side of the canister 26 is the drain port 376; at the bottom of the canister 26 is an output port 54. The ultrasonic generator 300 is disposed inside the hollow interior 41 of the stationary filter 220. The inlet valve 167 is coupled to the port 32 and the drain valve 171 is coupled to the drain port 376. The valves 167/171 and the ultrasonic generator 300 are operated by a controller (not shown) during the cleaning process of the stationary filter 220 itself, as will be discussed later.

As shown most clearly in Fig. 19, the stationary filter 220 is positioned inside a chamber formed by a circular wall 380. The wall 380 comprises a plurality of sets (e.g.,

eight) of vertically-aligned holes (e.g., ¼" diameter) dispersed around the circular wall 380 (see Fig. 17); one hole 382 of each of the plurality of vertically-aligned holes is shown in Fig. 19. As will be discussed in detail later, the circular wall 380 acts to minimize the effects of the high velocity particulate-contaminated input flow 165, as well as to deflect and disperse the flow 165 all around the stationary filter 220 .

The stationary filter 220 comprises three parts: (1) an outer wire cloth layer 384 (e.g., 5 microns); (2) an inner 40-50 mesh layer 386; and (3) an inner perforated metal enclosure 388 (e.g., 16-18 gauge, stainless steel) all of which are microwelded together. The perforated metal enclosure 388 comprises staggered holes 390 (e.g., ¼" diameter, see Fig. 17) that results in an overall surface area that is approximately 50-60% open. The outer wire cloth layer 384 filters out the particulate contaminants of incoming fuel oil flow that passes through the holes 382 in the circular wall 380; in particular, as the incoming fuel oil flow 165 passes through an outer surface 385 (see Fig. 18) of the wire cloth layer 384 to an inner surface 385 of the wire cloth layer 384, the particulate contaminants lodge against the outer surface 385 . The 40-50 mesh layer 386 disperses the cleaned input flow around the periphery of the perforated metal enclosure 388 and through all of the holes 390 therein. The cleaned fuel oil flow then flows downward through the hollow interior 41 of the stationary filter 220 and through the output port 54 .

As can also be seen most clearly in Fig. 19, several continuous support members 392 are disposed between the outer wire cloth layer 384 of the stationary filter 220 and the circular wall 380. These continuous support members 392 form independent sectors 394 (e.g., eight, Fig. 19) around the periphery of the wire cloth layer 384. As mentioned earlier, during normal fuel oil flow, the effects of the high velocity particulate-contaminated input flow 165 are minimized by the presence of the circular wall 380 and

the sectorization formed by the continuous support members 394; these sectors 394 segment the input flow 165 so that the input flow 165 impacts the wire cloth layer 384 around the entire stationary filter 220 . In particular, once the particulate-contaminated input flow 165 in each sector 394 passes through the vertically-aligned apertures 382, the input flow 165 encounters the outer surface 385 of the wire cloth layer 384 which traps the particulate contaminants therein. As also mentioned earlier, the cleaned fuel oil then passes through the 40-50 mesh layer 386 which disperses the cleaned input flow around the periphery of the perforated metal enclosure 388 and through all of the holes 390 therein. The cleaned fuel oil flow then flows downward through the hollow interior 41 of the stationary filter 220' and through the output port 54

The stationary filter 220' is releasably secured inside the canister 26' using four tie bars 396 (Fig. 19) that couple between a lower baseplate 398 and an upper securement surface 400. To properly seal the stationary filter 220' inside the canister 26' an upper annular seal 402 (e.g., rubber, see Fig. 18) and a lower annular seal 404 (e.g., rubber) are used.

The ultrasonic generator 300 (e.g., the Tube Resonator RS-36-30-X, 35 kHz manufactured by Telsonic USA of Bridgport, NJ) is releasably mounted in the hollow interior 41 of the stationary filter 220'. In particular, an elongated housing 393 of the ultrasonic generator 300 is suspended in the hollow interior 41 of the stationary filter 220'. Thus, when the reverse flow of clean fuel oil 179 occupies the hollow interior 41, the ultrasonic generator 300 is energized wherein the ultrasonic energy is applied to the wire cloth layer 384 in the direction shown by the arrows 395 through the holes 390. The elongated housing 393 is attached to an electrical connector 397 which forms the upper portion of the ultrasonic generator 300. The electrical connector 397 is then releasably secured to the canister 26' (e.g., a nut 399). A wire harness 401

provides the electrical connection to the ultrasonic generator 300 from the controller (not shown). In this configuration, it can be appreciated by one skilled in the art, that the ultrasonic generator 300 can be installed/replaced rather easily without the need to disconnect any plumbing from the input port 32', output port 54' or drain port 376.

During normal operation, the inlet valve 167 is open and the drain valve 171' is closed, thereby allowing the contaminated fuel oil flow 165 to be cleaned by the stationary filter 220' as discussed above. When the stationary filter 220' itself is to be cleaned, the controller (not shown) closes the inlet valve 167 while opening the drain valve 171'. As a result, a high pressure reverse flow 179 of clean fuel oil flows from the output port 54' and through the three-part stationary filter 220' and out through the drain port 376. As this reverse flow 179 passes through the wire cloth layer 384, the particulate contaminants are dislodged from the outer surface 385' of the wire cloth layer 384 and then driven out through the drain port 376. It should be noted that during this high pressure reverse flow 179, the continuous support members 392 also act to prevent the wire cloth layer 384 from separating from the mesh layer 386. The reverse flow 179 is applied for a short duration (e.g., approximately 4-5 seconds).

At the end of this application, and while there is still clean fuel oil in the hollow interior 41 but where the flow 179 is simply migrating (e.g., movement of clean fuel oil in inches/minute) rather than flowing, the controller (not shown) activates the ultrasonic generator 300 for a longer duration (e.g., 30 seconds to a couple of minutes) to provide for further cleaning of the wire cloth layer 384 by using ultrasonic energy to dislodge any remaining particulate contaminants in the wire cloth layer 384 into the migrating fuel oil flow and out through the drain port 376.

Without further elaboration, the foregoing will so fully illustrate our invention and others may, by applying current or future knowledge, readily adapt the same for use under various conditions of service.

CLAIMS

1. A fuel oil cleaning system for use with a fuel oil flow having particulate contaminants therein, said cleaning system comprising:

an inlet valve for controlling the fuel oil flow having particulate contaminants therein forming a contaminated fuel oil flow and wherein the contaminated fuel oil flow flows through a first output port of said inlet valve;

a stationary porous member positioned in the contaminated fuel oil flow that passes through said first output port, said contaminated fuel oil flow entering said stationary porous member through a first porous member surface and exiting through a second porous member surface towards a second output port, said contaminated fuel oil flow depositing the particulate contaminants on said first porous member surface to form a clean fuel oil flow that flows toward said second output port;

an ultrasonic generator adjacent to the stationary porous member which is operable during a portion of a cleaning process to facilitate dislodging particulate contaminants from the first porous member surface;

an outlet valve coupled to said second output port for controlling said clean fuel oil flow;

a flow control means, operated during a porous member cleaning process, having a flow control means input coupled to a source of clean fuel oil and a flow control means output coupled to said second output port, said flow control means controlling a reverse flow of said clean fuel oil that flows from said second porous member surface through said first porous member surface for dislodging the

particulate contaminants from said first porous member surface to form a contaminated reverse flow of fuel oil;

a drain valve coupled to said first output port for directing said contaminated reverse flow of fuel oil towards a drain during said cleaning process; and

said inlet valve and outlet valve being closed during said cleaning process.

2. The fuel oil cleaning system of Claim 1, wherein said source of clean fuel oil is a pressurized fuel oil reservoir.
3. The fuel oil cleaning system of Claim 1 or 2, wherein said source of clean fuel oil is clean fuel oil that has passed thorough said outlet valve.
4. The fuel oil cleaning system of any one of Claims 1 to 3, wherein said stationary porous member comprises a cylindrical-shaped filter and wherein said first porous member surface is the outer surface of said cylindrical-shaped filter and wherein said second porous member surface is the inner surface of said cylindrical-shaped filter.
5. The fuel oil cleaning system of Claim 4, wherein said cylindrical-shaped filter comprises a wire cloth configuration.
6. The fuel oil cleaning system according to any one of the preceding Claims, wherein said flow control means comprises a purge valve.

7. The fuel oil cleaning system according to any one of the preceding Claims, wherein said flow control means comprises a check valve and a flow restricting orifice.
8. The fuel system according to Claim 1, wherein the stationary porous member comprises a cylindrical-shaped filter, the first porous member surface is the outer surface of the cylindrical-shaped filter and said second porous member surface is the inner surface of the cylindrical-shaped filter, and the ultrasonic generator is located in the bore of the cylindrical-shaped filter.
9. The fuel system according to Claim 8, wherein the porous member comprises an inner rigid enclosure having a plurality of perforations; a mesh layer around said inner enclosure; and, a wire cloth layer around said mesh layer.
10. A fuel oil cleaning system according to any one of Claims 1 to 9, wherein a third output port coupled to a drain through a drain valve and a control means is provided which is operable to close said inlet valve while said drain valve is opened during a cleaning process for generating a reverse flow of said clean fuel oil that flows from said second output port towards said third output port, said reverse flow of said clean fuel oil flowing through said stationary porous member from said second porous member surface through said first porous member surface for dislodging the particulate contaminants from said first porous member surface to form a contaminated reverse flow of fuel oil that flows into said drain; and the control means is operable to close said drain valve and open said inlet valve after said cleaning process is completed.

11. The fuel oil cleaning system of Claim 8 or Claim 9, wherein a rigid closed wall surrounds said stationary porous member, said closed wall comprising a plurality of vertically-aligned holes for passing said contaminated fuel oil flow towards said stationary porous member.
12. The fuel oil strainer of Claim 11 wherein a plurality of support members are disposed between said rigid closed wall and said wire cloth layer, said support members forming a plurality of chambers between said rigid closed wall and said wire cloth layer and wherein each of said chambers comprises one of said plurality of vertically-aligned holes.
13. The fuel oil strainer according to any one of Claims 9 to 12, wherein said mesh layer is a 40-50 mesh layer.
14. The fuel oil strainer of Claim 13 wherein said wire cloth layer comprises pores of approximately 5 microns.
15. A method for cleaning a contaminated fuel oil flow having particulate contaminants therein, said method comprising the steps of:

positioning a stationary porous member in the contaminated fuel oil flow such that the contaminated fuel oil flow enters said stationary porous member through a first porous member surface and exits through a second porous member surface toward an output port, the contaminated fuel oil flow depositing the particulate contaminants on said first porous member surface;

disposing an ultrasonic generator adjacent said stationary porous member;

activating said ultrasonic generator during a portion of said cleaning process to facilitate dislodging the particulate contaminants from said first porous member surface;

isolating said stationary porous member from the contaminated fuel oil flow during a cleaning process;

passing a reverse flow of clean fuel oil from said output port and through said stationary porous member from said second porous surface member surface to said first porous member surface for dislodging the particulate contaminants from said first porous member surface to form a contaminated reverse flow of fuel oil;

opening a drain to receive said contaminated reverse flow of fuel oil;

discontinuing said reverse flow of clean fuel oil while closing said drain to complete said cleaning process; and

recoupling said stationary porous member to the contaminated fuel oil flow.

16. The method of Claim 15, wherein said step of disposing said stationary porous member in the contaminated fuel oil flow comprises positioning a cylindrical-shaped filter screen in the fuel oil flow such that said first porous member surface is the outer surface of said cylindrical-shaped filter screen and wherein said second porous member surface is the inner surface of said cylindrical-shaped filter screen.

17. The method of Claim 15, wherein said step of disposing said stationary porous member in the contaminated fuel oil flow comprises:

providing an inner rigid enclosure having a plurality of perforations;

wrapping a mesh layer around said inner rigid enclosure;

wrapping a wire cloth layer around said mesh layer, said wire cloth layer comprising said first porous member surface and said second porous member surface; and

wherein said reverse flow of said clean fuel oil flow passes through said wire cloth layer, said mesh layer and through said perforations in said inner rigid enclosure.

18. The method of Claim 17, wherein said inner rigid enclosure, said mesh layer and said wire cloth layer are cylindrical.
19. The method of Claim 17 or Claim 18, wherein the ultrasonic generator is disposed inside of said inner rigid enclosure.
20. The method of Claim 15 wherein said step of positioning a stationary porous member in the contaminated fuel oil flow comprises segmenting the contaminated fuel oil flow into a plurality of flows around the periphery of said wire cloth layer.

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